

## WHY NOT CHECK THE LITERATURE MORE CAREFULLY?

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The writer has recently noticed an increasing tendency for authors to overlook or disregard publications that are directly correlated with their own articles. This practice has resulted in the publication of identical or similar results, and in many instances readers receive the impression that no related work has previously been done. Such a paper may be looked upon as simply an incidental isolated observation, whereas if the author had correlated his work with previously published data, the article may have been one of lasting value.

There are probably two main reasons for this fault in scientific writing. Present day research workers are frequently under so much pressure to publish that they are likely to rush into print without properly checking the literature. Another reason, of course, is that papers published in obscure journals, or those to which the writer does not have access, may remain unnoticed until it is abstracted in some publication with a wider circulation.

The present short paper is in the nature of a plea for a more careful study of the literature before publication, and for the inclusion in scientific articles of related material that has been previously reported. The examples cited below illustrate the type of article which the writer has in mind. Most readers can doubtless recall similar publications in their own fields.

Wilson, Barnes and Fellton (1946) published a list of the mosquitoes known to occur in Pennsylvania with biological and collecting notes relative to each species. In June, 1947, the writer (Breland 1947) published a short article on Pennsylvania mosquitoes, and reported the collection of *Megarhinus septentrionalis* D. & K. in the state for the first time. In November, 1947 this same species was reported to have been collected for the first time in Pennsylvania (Stabler 1947). In this case the latter paper may well have been submitted for publication before the writer's article appeared, but a footnote could have been added when the proof was received for correction.

Additional notes on Pennsylvania mosquitoes were published in 1948 (Stabler 1948). One stated objective of this paper was to modify certain conclusions that had been reached by Wilson, Barnes

and Fellton (1946). However, some of the statements are somewhat misleading since cognizance is not taken of a later paper. Stabler states that Wilson, Barnes and Fellton have recorded *Orthopodomyia signifera* (Coq.) from only two localities. This is true, but why disregard a third record (Breland 1947)? *Psorophora ferox* (Humboldt) is considered by Wilson, Barnes and Fellton to be "extremely rare," while Stabler points out that in Delaware County the species is probably not as rare as formerly thought. The writer in 1947 suggested that this was probably true for *P. ferox* in Cumberland County. It seems unlikely that this is a case of inaccessibility to the literature, since the writer's paper was published in the same journal as that of Wilson, Barnes and Fellton.

Bick and Penn (1946) reported some experiments in which pupae of mosquitoes placed on moist filter paper later emerged as adults. They referred to earlier observations in which similar results were obtained, thereby coordinating several sets of data and causing the paper to have considerably more value for the reader. Masters (1948) reported similar results for another species of mosquito, but no reference was made to previous related work. Observations of this type should certainly be recorded, but such a paper would be much better if the data were correlated with similar publications. This particular paper, by the way, would have been more understandable if the author had used the generally recognized scientific name of the mosquito under discussion. *Culex fatigans* Wiedemann was the name he used, although most American workers at least, consider this name to be a synonym of *C. quinquefasciatus* Say.

It is quite obvious that the quality of entomological writing could be greatly improved by a little extra work on the part of authors. Specific suggestions include the following.

Before a worker publishes a paper he should carefully review the literature for related publications. This is especially important for anyone planning to publish on some subject outside the field of his usual research interest. Entomological literature is so extensive today that it is almost impossible for a person to be thoroughly familiar with all publications in several fields. The easiest method of making a quick literature survey is, of course, by the use of abstracting journals such as Biological Abstracts. Even the most careful worker may occasionally overlook important articles in obscure journals, but abstracting journals of one type or another

are available to most workers, and for this reason there is small excuse for such papers to be overlooked indefinitely. If related work has been published, it is quite helpful to interested readers for the author to correlate briefly his findings with those of other men; or at least to refer to these previous publications.

Recent changes in scientific names should always be indicated in entomological writing; or if there is disagreement as to which of two names should be used for a certain species, both scientific names should be noted. Unless this is done, many readers will not recognize the species under discussion. Writers who are careful in this respect will be doing their readers a real service.

In conclusion the writer wishes to make it clear that he does not consider himself entirely free of the faults that have been discussed, but he at least is trying to correct them.

#### LITERATURE CITED.

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